

DPH Reminds Delawareans to Avoid Consuming Raw Dairy Products; Announces Positive Case of Brucellosis

DOVER – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is reminding Delawareans to avoid consuming raw dairy products as it announces a confirmed case of brucellosis caused by *Brucella melitensis* in a 46-year-old Sussex County woman. The illness is a bacterial infection, which primarily affects those consuming, or coming into contact with, contaminated animals or animal products. The most common source of infection is through the consumption of raw, unpasteurized dairy products. Prior to becoming ill, the patient in this case had consumed unpasteurized homemade dairy products from Mexico. No other risk factors have been identified. The individual was hospitalized and is recovering after being treated for the illness. A second, related case of brucellosis is also pending confirmation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Brucellosis infection is most frequently transmitted by eating or drinking raw/unpasteurized dairy products such as milk and cheese, yet can also be contracted through inhalation or physical contact with infected animals or animal products. When sheep, goats, cows or camels are infected, their milk becomes contaminated with the bacteria. If the milk from infected animals is not pasteurized, the infection will be transmitted to people who consume the milk and/or cheese products. Brucellosis is not common in the United States. Nationally, the average is less than 200 human cases each year. Person to person transmission is rare. Prior to this case, DPH has confirmed three cases since 2010; those cases occurred in 2010, 2017 and 2018. The case in 2010 was

associated with consumption of unpasteurized milk while the nature of exposure in the 2017 and 2018 cases is unknown.

“Cases such as this one can serve as an unfortunate reminder that we are vulnerable to certain bacteria and should take precautions to protect ourselves,” said DPH Medical Director Dr. Rick Hong. “Delawareans are encouraged to avoid purchasing and consuming unpasteurized dairy products. Consuming questionable food items is not worth the risk to your health.”

Raw milk and milk products are those that have not undergone a process called pasteurization that kills disease-causing germs. These types of products are common outside the United States and are increasingly being sold in mainstream supermarkets in the United States as well, though sales are not permitted in Delaware. A wide variety of germs that are sometimes found in raw milk can make people sick. These germs include *Brucella*, *Campylobacter*, *Cryptosporidium*, *E. coli*, *Listeria*, and *Salmonella*.

The state’s Milk Safety Program, as well as statewide inspections of retail food establishments, are in place to protect consumers from purchasing or consuming raw dairy products, but unlawful distribution may still occur. Some neighboring states allow for the sale of raw dairy products, therefore residents should be aware of the health risks associated with consuming these products before purchasing and consuming them.

Signs and Symptoms of brucellosis are similar to the flu. Initial symptoms include fever, sweats, malaise, anorexia, headache, muscle or joint pain, and fatigue. Antibiotics are typically prescribed to treat brucellosis. In pregnant women, *Brucella* infections can be associated with miscarriage. Symptom onset can occur anywhere from five days to six months following exposure. Depending on the timing of treatment and the severity of illness, recovery may take several weeks.

No vaccine is available to prevent developing brucellosis, but preventive measures can be taken:

- Do not eat, drink, or purchase unpasteurized milk or dairy products, especially while traveling outside the U.S. Locations that commonly sell dairy products include supermarkets, farmers' markets and dairy farms.
- Read the label on milk or milk products before you buy them. Many companies put the word "pasteurized" on the label. If you are not sure, ask a store employee if specific brands are pasteurized.
- At farm stands or farmers' markets, ask if the milk and cream being sold have been pasteurized. If the market sells yogurt, ice cream, or cheese, ask if they were made with pasteurized milk.
- Meat packers, hunters and slaughterhouse employees should wear protective gloves and wash their hands thoroughly when handling raw meat.

For more information about brucellosis, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/brucellosis/index.html>. For more information about the risks of consuming raw milk and unpasteurized dairy products, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-index.html>.

The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.